



### GENERATION Y AT WORK

Mention Generation Y and be prepared for a verbal onslaught! Why does this particular group evoke such strong reactions from other staff members? How can you as an employer use what Gen Y offer to best workplace advantage?

Before looking at what drives this group, let's consider each generation in terms of their ages and values.

Loosely classified, the veteran group constitutes those aged 60-65 plus, the Baby Boomers are usually aged between 45 and 65, Generation X comprises 25 to 45 year olds and Generation Y is made up of those aged under 25 years old.

Each of these groups has had largely different experiences, which is reflected in their attitudes to, and perspectives of, work.

The veteran group (aged 60-65 plus years) is post-war. This particular generation are mindful of money and waste, and if at all possible remain debt free. They are grateful for work, and are usually loyal to their first (and sometimes only) employer for most of their working life. In return they expect that loyalty to be reciprocated.

The Baby Boomers – (45 and 65 years) generally experienced more prosperity than their forebears did. They typically left home between 16 and 20 years of age and supported themselves. They have an inbuilt belief that work is an essential part of survival for them. At work they comply with expectations set, and hold the strong belief that if they don't work hard, the rewards don't come. Baby boomers' have a great work ethic.

The Generation X group (25 to 45 years) tended to grow up in a double income family. Generally speaking - they saw how hard their parents worked and how (at times) unhappy they were in their jobs. Their current value system is that although work is a necessary part of life, it is not the most important part. Following on from their parents' efforts, it is this generation that helped promote flexible hours and parental leave for both parents. Their motto is: Work is a means to an end!

Generation Y (Under 25 years) as a general rule, tend to be very creative and have a flexible approach to work. They have experienced their parents coping with the impact of redundancy and downsizing. The impact being, there is no such thing as a job for life! As a result, they believe that hard work and good character aren't the quickest way to create wealth or sustain an income.

They have also been brought up in a largely technological age, where leisure time spent in front of TV; Gameboys and Play Stations are the norm. Unsurprisingly they want stimulus, and believe that work should be fun. They want to work creatively, but get bored very quickly. A paycheck is not enough motivation for them to work hard. They are also aware they will probably work at ten different jobs in their lifetime!

Understanding what drives each generation can help build more tolerance and harmony in the workplace. Failing to understand what drives generation Y could result in recruitment and retention difficulties. We face a skills shortage and this generation provide the solution to it. Unlike previous generations they have not experienced unemployment - if they want work it is there for them. They can choose you or your competitor. More companies are realising that in order to attract and retain these young talents, they need to make the workplace interesting and fun. Right now, it is difficult for management who are struggling to maintain acceptable levels of customer service with fewer staff. Where do they find time/energy/resources to plan good recruitment and retention policies? Unfortunately there is no choice but to implement these sooner rather than later. It makes sense to be proactive rather than reactive - think the ambulance at the top of the cliff, rather than at the bottom!

Let's look at ways to attract and retain Generation Y employees:

**Communicate** with them so you impart your expectations, as well as listening to theirs.

**Be flexible** in terms of the variety and types of work given to them.

**Acknowledge** their skill base. They grew up on computers - get them to offer input with their strengths around technology.

**Build relationships** with them, as their loyalty will be with you – as a person, rather than the Company as an employer.

**Create a more appealing office environment** For example, they will appreciate having a morning tea shout once a week or having magazines and newspapers provided in the lunchroom.

**Publicise** good work done - give a simple thank you, a mention at a staff meeting or written card. This is to show you have noticed and appreciated their efforts.

**Offer training** over a wide variety of skills: communication, technical and leadership are all of value. This also shows your willingness to invest in them.

**Demonstrate inclusiveness;** within the first month, have a sit down meeting to discuss your ideas for them and their ideas for them. (Do this regularly).

What is helpful about observing the differences between Generation Y and the rest of us, is that we can develop a deeper understanding of what drives them. Once we assimilate this, it makes it easier to manage how they contribute to the workplace, rather than how they don't. Human nature dictates that if something is different from us and our values - it is therefore out of alignment with our thinking and subsequently wrong. If we continue down the road of negative judgement we create disharmony and a communication breakdown at work. We need to build our sensitivity around these issues and try to understand where Generation Y are coming from. Like the rest of us, it is based on their generational values. A good leader learns to recognise the differing perspectives amongst the generations, and is able to bring them together to create harmony within the workplace.

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